

SUSAN-ALEXIS BROWN

PH.D. CIVIL & ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING CANDIDATE

mechanics, materials, & structures



1. Where are you from?

Originally from Martinsville, NJ, and more recently Andover, MA.

2. Where did you get your undergrad degree from and what was your major?

Do you have a MS?

B.S. in Physics from Gordon College; B.S. in Civil Engineering from University of Southern California; M.S. in Civil Engineering from Northwestern University (as part of completing my PhD work)

3. What attracted you to engineering?

I was very interested in building design and engineering of structures from a young age. I had considered architecture before deciding that I wanted to incorporate my interest in math and science more deeply, and chose civil engineering instead.

4. What attracted you to pursue a Ph.D. in your specialty area?

During my undergrad at Gordon, I spent time researching bulk metallic glass formation under my advisor Dr. David Lee. Although I was not interested in pursuing that specific field, it definitely sparked my interest in materials in general, and combined with my interest in civil engineering, a material-focused specialty seemed intuitive. My current focus of hybrid structures came about more naturally due to the projects I have had the opportunities to work on at NU.

5. How do you explain your thesis research to a non-scientist?

I study the long-term movement of hybrid structures in buildings. For example, a building which is designed with both concrete and wood will have unique interactions between the two materials over 50-100 years, and I try to model those interactions.

6. What attracted you to NU?

It was primarily the material mechanics focus of my program (Mechanics, Materials, and Structures in the CEE dept.), however when I visited the campus for the department open house I was also impressed by the community within the department and that became a big part of my decision. The campus and location are also huge bonuses for me (I love winter).

7. What has been the highlight of your time at NU and CEE?

My research colleagues under Dr. Cusatis and Dr. Corr are a huge part of my success here, and my enjoyment during the past four years can be attributed in large part to the great environment my advisors cultivate within their groups.

8. What has been the most challenging aspect of your graduate school experience?

The overall level of self-motivation and independence needed in a PhD program has been very challenging for me, and I have definitely grown a lot in these areas over the past few years.

9. Can you tell us about your experience being mentored or mentoring others?

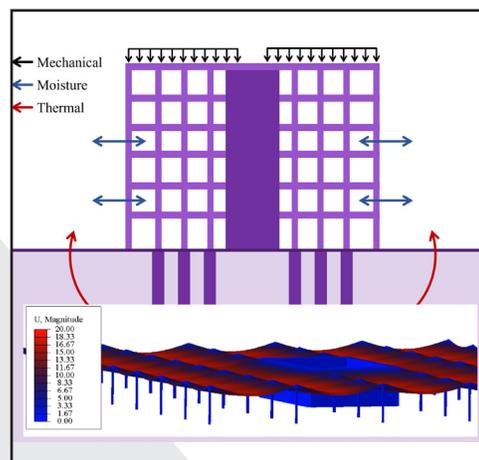
My seniors in my lab were amazing helpful when I first started out, and that experience really stuck with me. I try to promote a similar relationship with the newer students in my lab as well. I also spend a lot of time as a teaching assistant with the master students in our program, and that has really given me a sense of accomplishment in watching those students grow over the course of their program.

10. What are your interests or hobbies outside of your research?

I really enjoy gardening and baking. I am on the executive board of the Plant-it-Purple Graduate Gardens, and plant-mom to numerous houseplants, as anyone who has seen our office is well aware of. I also spend a lot of time baking breads and cakes, and fully enjoy sharing the results with my lab mates.



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building materials research